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OPINION | Nuclearization of Indian Ocean: A Pakistan's Perspective

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By Beenish Altaf

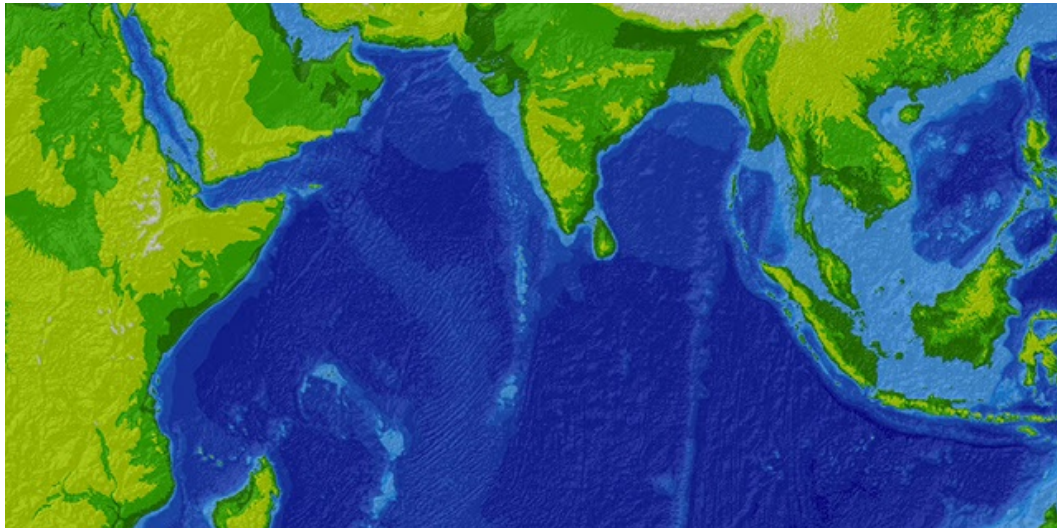


Image Attribute: Indian Ocean Bathymetry / Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The emanating threat to peace of Indian Ocean is mainly due to the nuclearization initiated by Indians. Out of which, the chief elements or the **challenges to peace** in the ocean that could be counted among are listed as its militarization, increased missile capabilities, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and power projection by foreign militaries, in addition to piracy, illegal fishing, human, drugs and arms smuggling, maritime pollution and climate change.

The Indian Ocean, geo-strategically is present at the world's most fundamental part. It is the **third largest oceanic division** of the world and commands strategically important sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) that link the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia with Europe, East Asia, and the US. Around **80 percent** of the world's energy trade passes through the choke points of this region.

Pakistan is concerned with the alarming modernization of India's exasperated capabilities with regards to its missile and nuclear weapons. It would be pertinent to mention here that with the demonstration of the test launch of the **K-4 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) on March 31, 2016**, India's movement towards fielding an undersea deterrent is well taken. It was an indigenously built nuclear-powered submarine, the INS Arihant.

Due to the India's 'unrestrained behavior', it became necessary for Pakistan to take a step forward towards a sea-based deterrent. Therefore, for this reason, Pakistan decided over an equivalent measure and successfully test-fired a nuclear-capable submarine-launched cruise missile, **Babur-III on January 9, 2017**, that is considered a compelled step.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Sartaj Aziz while speaking at **an international forum** in Pakistan said that this trend is likely to intensify in the coming years. And that "we are aware of our national interests and every effort will be made to strengthen our capacity to ensure that we remain ready to meet the emerging maritime security challenges. For us, to remain oblivious of the developments taking place in the Indian Ocean region is not an option."

A **statement** issued by the Foreign Office states, "The reported Indian tests of a submarine-launched ballistic missile and development of a nuclear submarine fleet are serious developments, which impact the delicate strategic balance in the region. It has resulted in the nuclearization of the Indian Ocean." India wants to exercise its supremacy in the whole region by its nuclearization of Indian Ocean. It will certainly exacerbate the already fragile strategic balance in South Asia.

There is another concern gaining hype nowadays regarding the un-demarcated borders in the Sir Creek. Pakistan has to be more careful about defending its borders, land or sea routes because if the communication link with the vessel is disrupted, it could prove to be extremely risky. Consequently, a good amount of naval pressure is necessary to keep our sea lanes open and safe. Nevertheless, the Sir Creek border issue has a potential to cast a shadow on the maritime security.

Projection of military and nuclear power into the seas will grip the region into an arms race and inevitably place it at the risk of a nuclear showdown. Mr. Aziz said that the Indian navy's substantial expansion was a cause for concern for Pakistan and that Pakistan has a strategic stake in the [peaceful navigation](#) and security of the Indian Ocean region.

The Indian Ocean region is being taken with a sense of war whereas it is not all about war it has a potential of economic growth as well. It is a catalyst for peace and prosperity, cooperation, collaboration, connectivity, regional stability, and security. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah [emphasized](#) the substantial role being played by the Pakistan Navy in the sustenance of peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region that operationalisation of the CPEC and the Gwadar Port would lead to an exponential increase in maritime activities of the country's coast. "Consequently, responsibilities of Pakistan Navy for maintaining a secure maritime environment will also increase manifold. The Recent establishment of the Task Force-88 is also a step forward in this regard."

Ironically, India is heading day by day towards boosting massively its missile, conventional and unconventional capabilities. Pakistan has declared its intention of highlighting the dangerous implications of India's plans to nuclearize the Indian Ocean at all relevant international fora through a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Last but not the least, India is playing a dangerous game in pursuit of achieving the status of a great power and regional hegemony. As a result, it is the collective responsibility of all the involving states to share the burden to maintain security in the region keeping and acknowledging it as a common goal.

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